

Emma and Harry

“Emma” Dad said. “I have got something for you”.

“What is it”. I said

“I entered you in a Sheep dog Competition.”

“WICKED” I said . “When is it”

“Tomorrow”. Dad Said

Then Harry and I better get practising!

Come on Harry lets go.

Out into the big paddock we went.

I better practice my casting I thought. That’s the most important part in a sheepdog trial. If your dog doesn’t get around behind the sheep and pick them up nicely then you don’t have a chance to win.

I sat Harry behind me, just like I would in a trial and asked him to look for the sheep.

Harry’s ears pricked up and he looked past me trying to spot the three sheep grazing at the other end of the paddock. His body shook with excitement waiting for my command.

I sent him ‘over’, signalling with my hand for him to go out to the right and fetch the sheep. He seemed to know what I wanted and took off as fast as he could run. Out

to the boundary he ran, being careful not to disturb the grazing sheep.

Harry crouched as he approached the sheep, stalking them like a tiger, low to the ground. The sheep stopped grazing and turned to look at Harry as he approached.

I told Harry to stop with my hand above my head. Harry stopped and stared at the sheep waiting for my next command. “Steady Harry” I said. Not wanting to hurry the sheep up too much. “good boy” Harry was listening well.

I asked Harry to walk up. He slowly crept towards the sheep. The sheep lifted towards me and for a second started to run. “Stop” I called to Harry worried the sheep might bolt. As Harry stopped the sheep settled. Phew! I thought that was close. Sheep can be tricky that’s for sure. “Steady” I called and Harry again approached the sheep with a careful walk, stalking the sheep and trying not to upset them. Harry was really working well.

Dad gave me Harry. He was a late starting dog that dad had sold but he came back. We didn’t think he was going to make it as a sheep dog but I always thought he would. I liked him the best because he had beautiful red hair just like me. Harry your the best sheep dog I thought watching him work. Dad got that one wrong. Harry worked the sheep at a walk towards me and as he

brought them over I directed Harry around the sheep to position them on my right. Harry covered the breaking sheep that were not happy to be brought up to me and stared at them daring them to try again. He was in control alright.

“Did you see that dad?” I called seeing dad walking towards us.

“I sure did sweetie” dad said “He has turned out alright after all, work him like that tomorrow and you will be hard to beat.”

I could hardly sleep that night I was so excited. I had been in sheepdog trials before with dogs that dad had trained but this was the first time I had really trained a dog. Dad had helped of course but Harry really listened to me and had become my very own dog. I dreamt all night about Harry. I was sure he would do well.

We set off early. It was still dark. I woke up grumpy as I hadn't slept well but felt a lot better when I saw Harry wagging his tail. I think he knew what was happening and was as excited as me. He jumped up and licked me when I let him out of his pen. “Big day today Harry” I said

Harry gazed at me wagging his tail harder.

Sheepdog trials are always a long way away and I got a

bit nervous during the long drive. Butterflies in my stomach fluttered as I thought about the trial. All the things that could go wrong flashed through my head. What if the sheep escape I thought, or I forgot what to do. Boy I was nervous.

We arrived at the trial ground and checked the program. I was on before lunch but luckily not first. Dad had a couple of dogs entered and he was running before me. I hoped he did well as he gets grumpy when things go wrong.

I was waiting a long time. A very long time. I watched and saw that most of the people crossed. That meant they were disqualified straight away. The dog is not allowed to go between the handler and the sheep in a sheep dog trial.

I was feeling pretty scared.

Each handler had their turn. Nobody seemed to be able to get the sheep in the pen and finish the trial. They were very tough.

The sheep were big strong wooly sheep and some even chased the dogs. One man almost turned purple trying to get his dog to listen. I thought that was pretty funny. No one seemed to be doing very well.

Finally it was my turn. Dad gave me a hug and told me

to do my best. My butterflies were getting worse but Harry looked very calm so I knew we would be alright. "I guess it was up to me." I thought.

I took up my position at the marker post and told Harry to stop. I could see mum off to the side and she gave me a smile. She had the video filming so I thought I better get it right. Harry sat looking up the ground waiting for the sheep to be released. The judged waved to let the yardmen know he was ready and three sheep jumped out onto the trial ground. They stopped for a second then started to sniff, ears flickering. The buzzer went for the trial to start. I sent Harry. The ground was the size of a football oval. Me and Harry at one end and the sheep at the other. A fence ran around the boundary so the sheep couldn't escape, but some had managed to jump that. Harry would need to be careful.

Out around the boundary he ran his red flowing coat and big white main blowing in the breeze. The sheep spotted him as he approached halfway and started to walk towards him. Harry slowed staring at the sheep making sure they didn't surprise him and start to run. Harry stepped over the bunting flags, used to make sure the sheep are released in a straight line and took up his position directly behind the sheep. I called to him to stop.

"Stop Harry"

Harry stopped on his feet and the sheep turned to face

him still not convinced that this big red hairy thing was anything to worry about. I took a deep breath remembering all the other trials that day and how the sheep had ran past a lot of the dogs. Come on Harry you can do it.

A sheep broke, trying to head back to where he had been released. Harry, quick as lightning, covered the break almost putting his nose on the sheep's nose turning it back. Another sheep, stirred by the commotion, makes a dash. Harry is on to it turning it back. I couldn't do much but watch and hope Harry could keep them together. Good boy I thought as he covered another break. Working hard to keep the three sheep settled and together Harry brought them down towards me.

The sheep had to be brought into a D shape, marked on the ground in front of the casting post where I was standing, before I could move. It is like a half circle marked ten metres from the post. The sheep get nervous as they approach it especially when they see the handler standing there. I knew to be quiet and not move too much.

The sheep got closer and started to really test Harry, twisting and turning trying to escape. Harry dashed left then right each time blocking their escape until they finally came into the D.

Harry was panting. It wasn't a hot day but he had

worked pretty hard controlling these three. After a couple more attempts to break the sheep seemed to settle. I sighed with some relief. I asked Harry to “come round” directing him to the right. The judge said I was clear so off I walked. Harry circled the sheep to bring them behind me holding them by working their heads but allowing them to walk without running. His hard work was paying off and the sheep seemed to be accepting that Harry was the boss.

The object of a trail is to keep the sheep on a course which is marked on the ground. The sheep need to stay on your right hand side and your not allowed to stop walking once you set off until you get to the obstacles. There is a lot to think about and it takes plenty of practice.

The first obstacle approached. It was a race made by two panels with a funnel at the opening. Harry held them on my right as I approached the race and stepped into the circle from where I had to work the obstacle. This is the closest obstacle to where they had been released and the sheep could smell their mates hidden behind the hessian screen. They were pretty frisky and not keen to face up to the race.

Harry lined them up and I asked him to stop. The sheep settle at the opening looking for an escape. “Walk up Harry” I said asking him to come closer to the sheep. Harry slowly approached. The sheep nervously circled

stamping their feet. “Walk up Harry”

“Round Harry” I called as one sheep made a break for it. “Over Harry” covering another break. Harry was on to it turning the sheep back to the mouth of the race.

The biggest sheep looked down the race seeing there was an escape. Still not convinced he turned again but seeing Harry still creeping towards him he turned and down the race he went taking the other two with him. A big cheer went up from the crowd. I started to feel confident for the first time. Harry could do this.

The next obstacle was the bridge. Like the race it was two panels with a funnel opening but this time the sheep had to go up a ramp. This had caused a lot of trouble for most of the other competitors. The sheep didn't like the bridge.

Harry collected the sheep as they came out of the race and pulled them in behind me. The Race had stirred them up again so they tried another break. Not as convincing this time they had started to give in to Harry.

I stepped into the circle at the bridge and again Harry seemed to line them up. He was getting the idea and was doing a lot without my help. I called him in again. “Walk up Harry”

A sheep made a dash for it getting past the wing of the

bridge. Harry wasn't quick enough to stop it. "Over Harry" I called sending him to the left. He swang around and brought the sheep back. Another break this time to the right. The sheep thought the bridge was a trap and were not going on it. Harry covered well arcing out almost turning himself inside out and blocking the sheep's escape. My heart was in my mouth. I had seen a lot of the trials before mine run out of time at the bridge. I didn't want to be one of those. I wondered how much time was left. The Lady on the microphone was letting the crowd know what was happening. I could hear her cheering for me. Come on Harry. Harry looked composed and in control. "Walk up Harry" I could see the sheep were looking for somewhere to go. Suddenly one sheep turned and stepped onto the ramp. The others followed worried they would be left behind. Harry walked in. Up and over the bridge they went. The claps from the crowd were louder this time. Good boy Harry. Harry's tail wagged slightly. "Round Harry" I commanded sending him to collect the sheep as they came off the bridge. "Only the pen to go Harry"

The pen was four gates making an enclosed pen. The front gate was open but you had to shut it once you got the sheep in without them escaping. No-one had made the pen so far.

Harry wheeled around bringing the sheep onto my right again. I could see the circle where I had to stand to

work the pen and headed for it. “Steady Harry” I called.

The sheep, while much more settled, still were a challenge. They could sense a trap. Over to the right they headed, slipping down the side of the pen. “Over Harry” I called and Harry circled around the sheep.

The sheep turned back trotting around to the front of the pen. “Round Harry” I called bringing Harry off balance and lining the sheep up with the opening.

STOP! I called, Harry pulled up. In they went! I had done it. The butterflies kicked in again. “Stay Harry.” I walked quickly, hoping the sheep would stay there and grabbed the gate. It was heavy and hard to shut it was almost as tall as me. Harry was watching holding the sheep. One turned seeing me moving and looked to get out. Not this time buddy as I swung the gate closed.

The biggest cheer went up. I had made the pen. I gave Harry a hug. “Dads never giving you away again Harry your too good.” I was really excited. I had beaten even dad but I was sure he wouldn’t be too bothered. Not bad for an eight year old girl. Good on you Harry.

(Good on you Emma) Dad :-)

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